

Conflict and Colonialism in 21st Century Romantic Historical Fiction

Repairing the Past, Repurposing History

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Introduction

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Hsu-Ming Teo and Paloma Fresno-Calleja

On 25 December 2020, the romantic historical drama *Bridgerton* premiered on Netflix and rapidly became the company's most successful series to date, watched by 82 million households around the world and climbing to the number one spot for television drama in over 83 countries ("Bridgerton becomes"). The success of the *Bridgerton* series (three seasons to date), which are based on the English Regency-era series of romances by American novelist Julia Quinn, and the spinoff series *Queen Charlotte* (2023), marked the moment when the historical romance—hitherto considered a rather low-status feminine genre—became mainstream. Contributing to *Bridgerton*'s success was the fact that, as in Quinn's novels, the television drama eroticised the Regency period, sexing up the genteel world of the British upper classes first alluded to by Jane Austen during the early nineteenth century. Austen herself was far more interested in the upper-middle-classes than the British peerage, but the Regency historical romances that followed located the epicentre of love in the fantasy world of the aristocracy.

The Regency romance first developed as a "chronotope of romantic love" (Pearce 1998, 98–111) in the early twentieth century, thanks largely to the efforts of Georgette Heyer (Ficke 2020, 119), who single-handedly created a costume-rich world of balls, country house retreats and other exclusive social events frequented by the aristocratic London *ton* and governed by rigid rules of propriety, of which the preservation of the spirited romantic heroine's chastity and reputation was often key. Heyer's Regency chronotope and plots were then rehashed by her far less skilful and more stilted imitator, Barbara Cartland, who also placed a premium on the heroine's virginity. *Bridgerton* audiences might therefore have found novelty in the spectacle of a raunchy, sexed up Regency world if they were familiar only with the Regency era as it was represented in the novels of Austen, Heyer or Cartland. But any reader familiar with historical romances would have found little surprising in the erotic content on display in the period drama. When, in 1987, Carol Thurston decided that the sexualisation of the historical romance genre constituted a "romance revolution"

enabling women to explore new sexual identities, she was commenting upon a development that had been taking place since the early 1970s in the historical romance novels produced by the American romance publishing house Avon. So rapidly did erotic content in the historical novel become the norm that unless novels are categorised in the “Sweet” or “(religious) Inspiration” subgenres, romance readers of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries generally expect plenty of sex in their historical romances, whether or not such portrayals are “accurate” or “authentic” representations of the period. As Catherine Roach (2016) notes, the romance genre is nothing if not sex-positive for women (78–103).

Among mainstream television audiences and cultural critics, *Bridgerton* gained its reputation of novelty for another reason: unlike Quinn’s novels, which portrayed an all-white world, Shonda Rhimes, the producer, fantasised a Regency that is an anachronistic facsimile of twenty-first-century multiracial Britain.² In Rhimes’ Regency, German-born Queen Charlotte of Mecklenberg-Strelitz, consort of King George III, is a Black woman who ascends the throne and is accepted without question. Because the British queen is a Black woman, many other people of colour across the full spectrum of Britain’s social classes are able to take their place in British society and interact on equal terms with their white counterparts. Rhimes’ fantasy of a post-racial world—where race no longer matters because the King and Queen have healed racial divisions and prejudice through their love—has been critiqued by reviewers and online bloggers for being “colour blind” and failing to acknowledge that, in actual fact, the Regency era comprised a rigidly hierarchical society built on the structural racism of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The socially and economically powerful in Regency society were notoriously bigoted and fought to maintain white colonial privilege in the face of the burgeoning abolitionist movement. Critics of *Bridgerton* claim that by portraying a racially harmonious Regency in the romantic drama, the writers and producers missed the opportunity to explore meaningfully what it meant to be a person of colour during the early nineteenth century. For example, blogger Michele Thiel declares: “A marriage can’t undo the racial superiority of the British empire, which was closely linked to the ‘civilising mission’, the trans-Atlantic slave trade, or the ongoing racial discrimination and resentment towards people of colour after slavery was abolished” (“*Bridgerton* offers us”).

But the pleasurable fantasy offered by *Bridgerton*—the one that is accepted by its many fans—is precisely that love *can* heal all wounds: personal and public, psychological and social, past and present. In this sense, *Bridgerton* follows in the footsteps of two related features of women’s historical fiction in the twenty-first century: firstly, its deliberate and self-conscious refusal to adhere strictly to “accurate” portrayals of the past (Rousselot 2014, 6); and secondly, its interest in exposing

injustices done to women (Wallace 2005, 2) to ameliorate or repair the wounds of the past, thus repurposing it into a usable history for women in the present (Teo 2021, 192 and 200). Both developments represent the continuing attempts of women writers since the mid-seventeenth century (Spongberg 2002, 102) not merely to insert women into male-dominated histories but to recentre narratives of the past and the values that underpin their employment around women's lives, motivations, experiences and relationships.

The wide-ranging and internally heterogeneous category of "women's historical fiction" has been used to refer to works as different as Regency and Victorian romances, medieval crime fiction and family sagas, British working-class women's stories of hardship in the early twentieth century, bio-fictions of European queens and other powerful women, or romantic narratives set in different historical times and places. If "women's historical fiction" is a genre, it is a capacious and multitudinous one because it encompasses many other recognisable genres: literary, Gothic, crime, and romantic fiction among them. Feminist scholars suggest that two distinctive features nevertheless define the narratives and subgenres that shelter under the generic umbrella of "women's historical fiction". Firstly, they are all set in a period remote in time, thus providing the "necessary mingling of 'distance' and 'reality'" (Hughes 1993, 1) which enables, paradoxically, both escapism into the past and critical reflection upon the present. Secondly, they prioritise women's experiences, imagining fictional characters or recovering real female figures with the general aim of rescuing hidden or silenced historical perspectives (Wallace 2005, 1–24). This volume is concerned with women's historical fiction as narrativised through the genre of romantic fiction.

The women writers of romantic historical fiction we discuss in this volume explore, revise, repurpose and challenge the past in their novels to expose the extent to which past societies were damaging to women by instead imagining alternative histories. These authors employ the generic conventions of romance to narrate their understanding of historical and contemporary injustice, and to reflect upon women's achievements and the price they paid for autonomy and a life of public purpose. In doing so, these novelists embark on a reparative reading and rewriting of past and present society that the romance is deeply engaged in. As Catherine Roach argues in her landmark work *Happily Ever After: The Romance Story in Popular Culture* (2016), the popularity of romance novels derives from the fact that "they do deep and complicated work for the (mostly) women who read them" and that "[t]here is a reparative aspect to this work, to try to make up for the costs to a woman's psyche of living in a culture that is still a man's world" (11). In this volume we are interested in exploring this reparative work and how it is manifested when applied to patriarchy,

conflict and colonialism, both past and present. The novels we analyse focus on women-centred stories and feature romantic love relationships that take place within specific historical settings, themes and events: multiracialism and suffrage in nineteenth-century Britain, the US Civil War, World War II and the Holocaust. Beyond European shores, we explore how the colonial histories and postcolonial legacies of other regions—the United States, the Caribbean, India and Australia—are handled by women writing romantic fiction. We analyse historical novels that portray women breaking out of their historically circumscribed expectations as wives and mothers, but we also consider those stories where women settle for these roles because of the promise of romantic love.

Building on Jerome de Groot's work (2016) on the study of historical genre fiction as a form of historiography, we examine settings or eras that are unusual or challenging for the romance, interrogating how twenty-first century romantic fiction grapples with the deeply painful and uncomfortable historical legacies of war, genocide, colonialism and racism. Our aims are, firstly, to discuss the work of revision or reparation being performed by romantic historical fiction and, secondly, to analyse how the past is being repurposed for use in the present. We contend that the discourses and genre of romance work to provide a reparative reading of the past but also that there are limitations and entrenched problems to such readings. In creating usable, serviceable pasts, historical novelists embark on acts of representations that either affirm or contest certain types of historical interpretations—or historiographies—of the past; we are interested in exploring whose interests—literary, commercial or political—are being served by these revised representations. To answer these questions, we reflect on what it means for certain past conflicts and contexts to be presented and read as “romantic”, and what “romance” means in the context of these novels. The answers are sometimes quite discomfiting.

Romantic Historical Fiction

Although we draw heavily upon the breadth and depth of scholarship that exists on the popular romance novel (see Kamblé, Selinger and Teo 2020), and most of the works discussed here clearly fall into this category, we use the term “romantic historical fiction” rather than “historical romance” as a more encompassing label. There are several reasons for this. The “romance novel” today is widely understood to be a story that focusses on a central love relationship that ends optimistically with the lovers united for the foreseeable future (Romance Writers of America, the Romance Writers of Australia, Radway 1984, Regis 2003 and Roach 2016). But, historically, the term “romance” encompasses much more than a love story with a “happily ever after” (HEA) ending, and we are also interested in exploring those love stories that are romantic but do

not end with the lovers together. We recuperate some older meanings and forms of the romance genre to reflect upon how the genre intersects with historical fiction to romanticise the past and to discuss the function of the personal, the intimate and the romantic in the recreation of certain historical periods and events.

Romance is one of the oldest genres of fiction. Over the last millennium, it has meant, variously, a tale of (male) chivalry and adventure, often involving supernatural elements and extravagant plot contrivances and coincidences; a story set in a time and place remote or distant from the present; and a category of fiction that includes love stories (Fuchs 2004, 3). The term “romance” was used to describe the historical fiction of Sir Walter Scott in the nineteenth century because Scott’s novels embraced at least two of these three definitions of romance. It was also used to describe the exotic, swashbuckling adventure novels of Frederick Marryat, Robert Louis Stevenson, G.A. Henty and H. Rider Haggard, among other male imperial romance novelists. From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, however, the term “romantic fiction” became increasingly feminised and associated with love stories centred around women’s lives and their experiences of courtship and love (Anderson 1974, 25). In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, romantic fiction did not necessarily end with the lovers triumphantly united, having overcome all obstacles to their union. The tragic love story—where the lovers are parted by death or some other equally dramatic obstacle at the end of the story—was popular in the nineteenth century because, as Rachel Anderson suggests, “traditionally, the truest, purest romantic love is a fatal love” (26).

From the early twentieth century, however, an expectation developed that romantic fiction should end happily with the lovers united for the foreseeable future. In the Anglophone romance industry, the term “romance novel” denotes a fictional work which necessarily features a happy ending, where the main obstacles to love have been overcome and the lovers are united in hope for a future together. This definition was formalised by Pamela Regis’ foundational monograph, *A Natural History of the Romance Novel* (2003)—a work that analyses the plot trajectory and thematic architecture of the romance novel which, Regis argues, are formed by eight essential narrative events:

romance novels always depict the following: the initial state of society in which heroine and hero must court, the meeting between heroine and hero, the barrier to the union of heroine and hero, the attraction between the heroine and hero, the declaration of love between heroine and hero, the point of ritual death, the recognition by heroine and hero of the means to overcome the barrier, and the betrothal.

Freedom is the most important goal for the heroine of the romance novel, and romantic love is the journey and the ordeal she undergoes to find her freedom *to* love, her freedom *in* love and, consequently, her freedom to find fulfilment in life (see Gleason and Selinger 2015). However, the love story which ends with the lovers tragically parted because they cannot find a way to “live happily ever after” has never been superseded. It characterises many “single-title” novels about romantic love.

Where the American romance industry focuses on the “romance novel”, the Romance Writers of Australia establishes a distinction between a “romance” defined as “a book where the romance itself is the main plot and the romance resolves happily or optimistically”, a “romantic” novel which “has romance as an integral part of the plot but other areas of focus as well” and a “love story” which “revolves around a romantic relationship but need not end happily” (“About romance”). For its part, the British Romantic Novelists’ Association takes a wider remit and invokes a looser definition that looks for romance “everywhere in fiction”:

From stories that focus entirely on the developing relationship between two people, to fiction that shows a budding romance as one part of the hero or heroine’s journey, and into books that focus on long-standing relationships weathering storms [...] romantic fiction explores and celebrates love in all its messy, unexpected, improbable, imperfection.

(“About Romantic Fiction”)

“Romantic fiction” in this definition is therefore the broader umbrella term, under which the narrower “romance novel” with its “eight essential narrative elements” shelters.

In this volume, we revert to older definitions of “romance” as a genre that is set in a distant time, includes adventure and encompasses both the popular romance novel and romantic fiction that recounts women’s experiences of love but that may not position the achievement of long-lasting romantic love as the sole telos of women’s lives. We call the novels explored in this volume “romantic historical fiction” because they are love stories that are set in the past; some include the HEA ending, but others do not necessarily conclude with the lovers united. In some cases, history gets in the way of a happy ending, and the past “resist[s] romantic novelization” (Ficke 2020, 124). In other cases, where a happy ending for the lovers is forced on the romantic plot in the face of adverse historical circumstances, the representation of the past may become problematic and distorted for political or commercial purposes. Using “romance” as a literary and textual strategy, as Fuchs argues, makes it possible to “[account] for the greatest number of instances, allowing us to address the occurrence

of romance within texts that are clearly classified as some other genre and incorporating the hybridisation and malleability that [...] are such key elements of romance” (9). Our aim is thus to discuss *romance as a tool* and *a strategy* through which women authors negotiate the tensions between problematic or traumatic historical contexts and periods, and the love stories of their female protagonists.

Favouring the term “romantic historical fiction” also allows us to bridge the supposed distinction between the more popular mass-market historical romances and more literary or middlebrow historical novels, which may not be labelled or marketed as “romances”. In her overview of the historical romance, Sarah Ficke (2020) points out that “there are no hard and fast rules about how *historical* a historical romance must be” (118; emphasis added). Similarly, we argue that while there is no proscription against *romance* in women’s historical fiction, it is often the case that the more romantic a historical novel is perceived to be, the less “literary” it is considered in the eyes of many readers or critics who assume that romantic content is incompatible with a “serious” historiographical agenda. This volume questions and challenges such views by reflecting on how romance and history may work as connecting threads between supposedly different genres, rather than as incompatible ingredients.

These intergeneric connections have not always been acknowledged by critics despite the fact that, as Wallace contends, “the shapes taken by the woman’s historical novel across the century have shifted back and forward across the ‘low-brow’/‘high-brow’ binary” (2005, 227). During the 1980s and 1990s, for instance, critical responses to the then highly respected works of women’s literary historical fiction failed to connect these works to a tradition that can be traced back to the popular historical romances of the 1920s (177). But, as Wallace notes, “the ‘popular’ and the ‘serious’ or ‘literary’ ends of the spectrum [...] are intimately linked” (5). Similarly, in their edited collection *The Female Figure in Contemporary Historical Fiction* (2012), Katherine Cooper and Emma Short contend that authors of historical fiction often “play on the associations of both female protagonists and female authors with the romance genre”; they “playfully exploit this association” (8) in novels which are perceived as being more “literary” but which appropriate and subvert the narrative conventions, plot devices, character choices or structural elements of the popular romance.

It is thus necessary to read “both ‘serious’ and ‘popular’ historical novels together and against each other if we want fully to understand the range of meanings that history and the historical novel have held for women readers in the twentieth century” (Wallace 2005, 5). Wallace’s monograph *The Women’s Historical Novel* (2005), in fact, includes analyses of influential books within the historical romance genre alongside literary novels, and places romance authors such as Georgette Heyer, Daphne du Maurier or Mary Stewart alongside literary authors like Antonia S. Byatt or Rose

Tremain. Lisa Fletcher's *Historical Romance Fiction: Heterosexuality and Performativity* (2008) adopts the same practice of reading Georgette Heyer and contemporary historical romance alongside their more literary counterparts. More recently, Ina Bergmann has discussed North American "new historical fiction" from a similar standpoint, arguing that "[i]t is not helpful to view historical romance, historiographic metafiction, and the new historical novel as distinct genres. Rather, they should be examined as developmental stages of historical fiction, as a literary continuum" (2020). As Jayashree Kamlé (2014) pertinently reminds us, romance novels are often approached by emphasising the formulaic nature of the romantic material, but they also possess an "inalienable *novelistic* nature" (3; original emphasis) which determines the genre's constant transformation over time, its internal complexity and, in the case of the novels discussed in the following chapters, their complex engagement with the politics of historical representation (24). The corpus of romantic historical novels we discuss share a romantic focus and a common historiographical intent, while attesting to the fluidity between apparently distinct genres.

Women's Historical Narratives across Time

Romance has always been crucial to women's historical narratives, in much the same way that an engagement with history has been integral to many popular romances. This is despite the common perception that the representation of history in romance novels is monolithic, conservative, nostalgic, irrelevant or inauthentic (De Groot 2010, 52; Wallace 2005, 227). The novels analysed in this volume are romantic, but they are also specifically historical: they take their historical settings seriously, and they engage in thoughtful ways with historical research and representation of the past. As Sarah Ficke (2020) remarks, the historical romance is not usually identified as a genre that warrants "special study or a historically informed approach. The 'historical' element of the novels often gets lost in assessments of their characters, plot structures, and socio-cultural messages" (119). In fact, although the first wave of romance scholarship produced some notable works that discussed women's historical romance—among them, Kay Mussell's *Fantasy and Reconciliation: Contemporary Formulas of Women's Romance Fiction* (1984), Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance* (1984) and Carol Thurston's *The Romance Revolution: Erotic Novels for Women and the Quest for a New Sexual Identity* (1987)—these studies generally ignore the specifically *historical* side of the term "historical romance", perhaps because these novels were not considered sufficiently "accurate" by critics. Helen Hughes' *The Historical Romance* (1993) is the first full-length study to map how the genre of historical fiction intersects with the genre of romance, and how the historical romance

became feminised from the early twentieth century onwards. Yet Hughes takes a broad view of romance as a staid and formulaic genre and does not consider seriously the idea that women's historical romance might have anything to say about history because, she asserts, "[w]omen's historical romance has never been over-concerned with presenting a picture of the past as a time of historical change" (11).

It was only from the 2010s onwards that academic scholarship began to analyse historical romance novels in relation to their specific historical setting. Hsu-Ming Teo's "Bertrice teaches you about history, and you don't even mind!" History and revisionist historiography in Bertrice Small's *The Kadin*" (2012) was among the first essays to consider how a specific historical romance novel might narrativise a woman-centred history of the Ottoman empire, what feminist challenges it might pose to traditional Turkish as well as European historical interpretations of the period and how readers engage with history when reading a historical romance. Our collection aims to address these critical omissions by prioritising a historical reading of certain romantic novels. In doing so, we are heeding Jerome De Groot's (2016) call to engage with fiction as an alternative means of "knowing" and "understanding" history at an intellectual and affective level.

For De Groot, historical fiction trains its audience to embark on the work of reading historiographically: not necessarily to read fiction as coeval with history but as "modes of knowing the past" which display or articulate a "historiographical sensibility" (3). De Groot was among the first scholars to embark on this particular work of historiography, analysing how historical interpretation of the past, as well as the expectations of readers with regard to accuracy and authenticity, are shaped by genres of fiction. In contrast to male-centred historical adventure novels—such as those written by Bernard Cornwell and Patrick O'Brian—which present an interpretation of the past that is often conservative and nationalistic (2010, 79), De Groot argues that romantic sagas such as Catherine Cookson's Kate Hannigan series interprets "the past as a place of privation that might be escaped, where women are particularly downtrodden. [...] a place of poverty, fear, drunkenness, neglect, illegitimacy and dirt" (55). It is the hegemonic structures of the social order—past and present—that keep women down and that create romantic love as the rare but only path of escape. Such an interpretation of the past is by its very nature critical and radical. Romantic historical fiction therefore engages with historiography, presenting certain implicit or explicit explanations about the causes of political and economic inequality and social injustice. The operation of gender, race, class and colonial oppressions are explored, even as the novels map out individual (and often anachronistic or improbable) routes to freedom.

Women writers have a long tradition of using fiction to insert themselves into the historical record. Mary Spongberg (2002) suggests that women's historical fiction began during a series of civil wars in France during the seventeenth century, when French noblewomen wrote memoirs and historical novels to record the part they played in these tumultuous events. Spongberg argues that these women writers fictionalised their account of the past possibly "to disguise its political nature and radical intentions" (75), masking their motivations by melding history with romance. In doing so, they "created a new genre of writing that was ostensibly fictional yet mimicked the writing of history. At the heart of this writing was a wish to advance the 'secret motivations for history'" (102). Women writers' preoccupation with recording these "secret motivations" prompted accusations that their writing was "more concerned with romance and thus less than factual" (75). Yet as Stephanie Russo (2020) demonstrates in her exhaustive examination of the multitudinous representations of Anne Boleyn from the sixteenth to the twenty-first centuries, even biographies of women such as Anne Boleyn purportedly based on "facts" were fictionalised from the start, biased by the historian's own political proclivities and fashioned to suit the religious or ideological agendas of the day. The life of Anne Boleyn began to be fictionalised during the eighteenth century, when English women started writing various types of historical fiction, and has continued to be narrativised since then because of an ongoing dissatisfaction with the available male-authored histories of Boleyn (72–3). By the twentieth century, these bio-fictions of Henry VIII's second queen began to draw from and focus heavily on romantic relationships. From its inception and especially throughout the twentieth century, then, women's historical writing has been intertwined with the genre of romance.

Despite the frequent dismissal of women's historical writing as "mere" romance, women writers have used history for the twin purposes of escape and political intervention. Both purposes are connected because the "need for escapism indicates a dissatisfaction with what is available" in real life (Wallace 2005, 2). For this reason, this body of fiction has always posed challenges to extant historiography. Diana Wallace's *The Woman's Historical Novel* directs scholarly attention to the many ways in which women writers have used this genre as a "licence" to explore ideas about history, women's lived experiences in the past and contemporary concerns around sexuality, masculinity, subversive femininities, the fluidity and historical contingency of gender as a constructed category, contraception, abortion and childbirth, as well as other topics usually deemed "masculine" such as war. Simply by including the experiences of women—by insisting that women's lives, ideas, values and concerns are worth inserting into the historical narrative—women writers challenged and subverted dominant male-centric ideas of history as the record of the public realm; a record obsessed with warfare, affairs of the state and of patriarchal social

and economic institutions, or interested primarily in the deeds, thoughts and productions of powerful men.

The nineteenth century was a great age of historical fiction, when the novels of Walter Scott—categorised as “romance” by contemporaries—appeared alongside the now often-forgotten historical fiction of women writers such as Grace Aguilar, Harriet Martineau, Margaret Oliphant or Jane Porter. However, as Helen Hughes (1993) shows, it was really in the early twentieth century that the genre became feminised and dominated by women writers. Wallace argues that women “turned to the historical novel in the 1930s as a way of making sense of history and their position within it” (34), with the result that the genre declined in literary reputation and cultural status throughout the twentieth century. These novels were not seen as engaging with “real solemn history” and were considered “vulgar” because they were “popular” and often romantic (1, 3). Georgette Heyer, who started writing in the 1920s, is often recognised as establishing the key patterns of the women’s historical romance (Hughes 1993, 39). Her historical novels generally focus on a central love story that ends with the union of both romantic protagonists, laying the narrative foundations of the historical romance for subsequent writers and establishing “a continuous line of development” for the genre which “could be traced from the beginning of the century to the 1980s” (3). Heyer’s earliest novels from the 1920s to World War II were largely set during the eighteenth-century Georgian period, but she is today commonly associated with the Regency romances that she wrote from the mid-1930s to the early 1970s, beginning with *Regency Buck* (1935). Barbara Cartland followed in Heyer’s footsteps, writing 723 romance novels set in Regency or early Victorian England. When Heyer published her last Regency romance, *Lady of Quality*, in 1972, the American writer Mary Deasy, writing under the pseudonym Clare Darcy, took over, publishing 15 highly imitative Regency romances between 1971 and 1982. Other authors such as Anya Seton and Jean Plaidy were producing different types of romantic fiction set in various historical eras and based around well-known royal women, but the market for the Heyer-derived love story set in the past was so lucrative that romance publisher Harlequin Mills and Boon established the Masquerade line in 1977 catering specifically to historical romance, while the Canadian branch of Harlequin began publishing a specific Harlequin Regency line from the late 1980s to the mid-1990s. Both Masquerade and Harlequin Regency were eventually subsumed into the current Historical line.

At the moment Heyer published her last Regency romance, the axis of historical romance publishing began to shift from Britain to the United States with the rise of Avon Books. Originally established in 1941 and now part of News Corp’s HarperCollins stable, Avon broke into the romance genre in 1972 with Kathleen Woodiwiss’ *The Flame and the Flower*: a novel now famous, or infamous, for its plot where the heroine is raped by the drunken

hero who believes she is a prostitute playing sexual games with him. She is forced to marry him and, as his wife, begins the tumultuous process of teaching him to respect women, and socialising him into her values and her world, which is always one of the main objectives of the romance genre (Dixon 1999, 9, and Phillips 1992, 58). Sarah Frantz and Eric Murphy Selinger (2017) point out that this novel (and other historical romances of the 1970s and early 1980s) has often been misread as glorifying male sexual violence and equating rape with romantic love. However, as Frantz and Selinger note in their close reading of *The Flame and The Flower*, Woodiwiss' novel "is not about 'making rape romantic' [...] but rather the utopian hope that romance—including happy, mutual, exuberant sexual love—can still be found in a culture of rape": the culture in which the novel was written (104). The first blockbuster historical romance which launched the resurgence of the genre in its modern form was therefore *ameliorative or reparative in its plotline because that is what romance does* (Roach 2016, 6). Only when the hero is truly remorseful for his actions and has been transformed into a husband who protects, provides and places all the needs and desires of his wife above his own is he finally rewarded with love. *The Flame and the Flower* was significant not only because it instigated what Thurston (1987) called the "romance revolution", sexualising and eroticising a genre that had so far featured virginal heroines and little sexual activity beyond passionate kisses; Woodiwiss' novel was also symbolic because the plot began in Regency London before crossing the Atlantic to plant itself firmly in the fledgling United States of America.

The plot of the American Woodiwiss' novel thus symbolised in some ways the passing of the torch of the historical romance novel from Heyer and her followers to the late twentieth-century American iteration of the historical romance. Heyer had been meticulous in the historical research she conducted for the background of her romances (Lancashire 2020, 1). Although her heroines and heroes are distinctly modern in sensibility and values, and the dialogue style she developed exemplifies a "necessary anachronism" (Lukács, cited in De Groot 2008, 217) to keep her prose accessible and her narrative plot-focused, Heyer also took pride in the factual accuracy of other details of setting, fashion or furnishing. As Helen Hughes observes, this contributes to the reader's sense of verisimilitude, the feeling that the author has "accurately" recreated or represented the past after "indefatigable scholarly research" (1993, 18). Where some American historical novelists such as Bertrice Small continued this process of incorporating careful historical research into their novels, others—notoriously, Johanna Lindsey, the bestselling American historical novelist of the 1980s and 1990s—eschewed historical research and appeared instead to rely on other historical romance novels they had read. The medieval, Regency and Victorian worlds in Lindsey's novels—or the novels of other 1980s American writers such as Rosemary Rogers or Laurie McBain—bear little

relation to history but are, rather, confected romantic chronotopes whose points of reference are purely intertextual and thus unconsciously and unintentionally postmodern. This drift into pure historical fantasy, combined with the now-vintage 1980s covers featuring gold-leaf titles and the romantic couple in a steamy clinch—the shirtless hero clasping the half-naked heroine, filmy clothing falling off her body—no doubt contributed to the derision directed towards the historical romance by non-romance readers.

In many ways, it is not surprising that little scholarly attention has been paid to women's romantic historical fiction despite its sustained growth, market share and evolution since the 1970s in thematic content and diversity of both authors and romantic protagonists. In fact, other forms of historical fiction were also of little interest to literary scholars until the 1980s, if we exclude the work of historian Herbert Butterfield in 1924 and Georg Lukács' highly influential study of the genre in 1955. In the 1980s, however, the resurgence of the “serious” and experimental historical novel both by male and female authors proved crucial for the historical novel to regain literary and scholarly attention and status, largely due to postmodern experimentation in narrative form. Wallace (2005) observes that “[p]re-1990 critical studies of the historical novel [...] have tended to work with a conception of ‘history’ which excludes women’s novels, thus constructing this as a masculine tradition” (14). From the 1990s on, coinciding with the so-called “historical turn” (Keen 2006, 167; De Groot 2010, 98), the assumption that serious history was the exclusive domain of male authors was no longer tenable. In the hands of female authors like Michèle Roberts, Angela Carter or Jeannette Winterson, the historical novel developed into a sophisticated and complex genre capable of fully incorporating the postmodern concerns and narrative techniques of historiographic metafiction (Hutcheon, 1988; Waugh 1984), while contributing to the feminist recovery of “herstory” (Wallace 2005, 177).

De Groot argues that the historical novel in the past few decades is no longer perceived as “the preserve of romance writers” (2010, 98), masculine adventure or of postmodern experimentation because it has expanded and diversified into so many different forms. Today, the historical novel is a form capable of folding “various tropes of formal, historiographical and theoretical radicalism into a newly popular, relatively sanitised blend” (91). De Groot defines this “middle-ranking historical fiction” as resulting from a “‘re-bourgeois’ of the genre, as a form that had been either experimental or non-literary” and has now become “a site of normality for middle-class authors” (98–9). He exemplifies these developments with reference to novels like *Restoration* (1989) by Rose Tremain or *Possession* (1990) by Antonia Byatt, which demonstrate “the popularity and possibility of the literary historical novel” (93) and their ability to “take the tools of postmodern historiographic metafiction and make them

mainstream and popular” (94). This observation ties in with more recent explorations of women’s historical writing which have moved away from evaluating these novels in terms of their historical accuracy, focussing instead on what women writers had to say about history-writing, or representations of the past. Much of this work, crucial to evaluate how women’s historical fiction has fared at the turn of the twenty-first century, coalesces in the somewhat nebulous concept of “neo-historical fiction”.

“New historical” or “neo-historical fiction” (Keen 2006; Boccardi 2009; Rousselot 2014; Harris 2017; Bergmann 2020) refers to contemporary historical novels that “recognise their own narratives as problematically constructed but continue to function as (fictionalised) narratives that have something to say about the past as well as the present” (Harris 2017, 194). Studies of the neo-historical novel are offshoots of the scholarly focus on neo-Victorian novels that developed around the turn of the twenty-first century. Kate Mitchell (2010) defines neo-Victorian novels as stories that are not merely set in the Victorian past but that grapple with how to remember and re-create that era, how to repackage and repurpose the Victorian past for contemporary relevance, and for commercial consumption in the present (3). She argues that neo-Victorian fictions are “less concerned with *making sense* of the Victorian past, than with offering it as cultural memory, to be re-membered, and imaginatively re-created, not revised or understood” (7). Neo-Victorian or neo-historical fiction and their precursor, historiographic metafiction, have emerged in response to the “functional knowability of the past in the present” and the problematic process of representation itself (Harris 2017, 194). However, Mitchell contends, neo-Victorian fiction is differentiated from historiographic metafiction by its commitment “to the possibility and the value of striving for” historical knowledge despite the limitations of this task. It is “more concerned with the ways in which fiction *can* lay claim to the past, provisionally and partially, rather than the ways it can not” (3). Elodie Rousselot (2014) observes that this process, whereby the historical novelist self-consciously and self-analytically engages in a re-interpretation, re-membering or reconstruction of the past, is characteristic of fiction set in many historical periods other than the Victorian era, which is why she suggests that the term “neo-historical” is more appropriate for describing this set of stories about the past. As Katherine Harris similarly argues,

[t]he neo-historical aesthetic acknowledges the inevitable failure of narratives about the past but—in contrast to its postmodern predecessor, historiographic metafiction—simultaneously and contradictorily works to create coherent stories about it that recognise their own limitations even as they attempt to overcome them.

(194)

The tenets of neo-historicism allow authors to tell a cohesive and coherent historical narrative while problematising historical representation, displaying a “simultaneous attempt *and* refusal to render the past accurately” (Rousselot 2014, 4). Repurposing the meaning and function of historical fiction in this way shifts the genre away from an anxiety over accurate representations to a utilitarian approach that uses the past as raw material for a creative bricolage. Readers, as Cooper and Short (2012) argue, “no longer expect to find a verifiable—or, occasionally, a recognizable—history within these narratives”. Instead, they willingly “suspend their disbelief in order to explore alternative depictions and/or modern adaptations of narratives” of the past, to interrogate ideologies, themes and other topics that matter today (6). Thus, the issue of whether the portrayal of the past in neo-historical fiction is “accurate” is neither the most interesting nor relevant question one can ask of these texts; their value rests in how the past can be re-imagined to be useful and pertinent to readers and audiences today.

The repurposing of the past which motivates women’s neo-historical fiction contains an implicit critique of the injustices and inadequacies of past societies, as well as of official historical accounts and literary representations which fail to provide a usable history that empowers their female readers and audiences. It is interesting, therefore, that the romance genre has proved to be an especially useful tool for authors from diverse ethnic backgrounds, or writing from marginalised positions, to re-vision the past and recentre it around non-white lives and non-white historiographies. This is a work which Black American romance writers such as Beverly Jenkins, Shirley Hailstock, Francine Craft and Gay G. Gunn have been steadily doing since the 1990s, when they began to incorporate research into African American history in their novels (Moody-Freeman 2020, 233). Jenkins, for example, introduced readers to nineteenth-century African American history in works such as *Night Song* (1994) or *Indigo* (1996), and her novels clearly show a deliberate historiographical intent (Dandridge 2004). Jenkins researched and wove stories about the experiences and legacies of Black slavery into her novels but chose to focus heavily on Black American agency throughout American history: the contribution of Black Americans to the American Revolution, the role they played in the Underground Railroad, the abolitionist movement, the Civil War, and the Buffalo Soldiers who served on the western frontier after the Civil War, among many other topics. Her novels included a bibliography of sources and suggestions for further reading into the history she engaged with. She was fascinated by the way American history was inextricably tied with Black American experiences and contributions, and her novels recentre the dominant historical narrative around Black American lives. This effort is not unique to Black American writers. Asian American authors such as Courtney Milan, Jeannie Lin and Sherry Thomas (see Teo

2020; Kamblé 2020), Latinx authors like Silvia Moreno-García and Mimi Milán, Caribbean authors like Adriana Herrera and Lydia San Andrés, and Indigenous Australian authors such as Anita Heiss, to name a few examples, have written romantic historical novels from perspectives previously unaccounted for. As Jayashree Kamblé shows in the chapter included in this volume, this collective effort to remediate historical amnesia and correct previous representative omissions is also shared by twenty-first century romance novelists such as K.J. Charles who, in her historical fiction, challenges and revises a whitewashed history that prevails in the vast majority of historical romance—including Quinn’s original *Bridgerton* series.

Since the twenty-first century, scholars have also engaged in postcolonial and decolonial readings of romantic fiction—both historical and contemporary—that seek to challenge and decentre white imperial identities, and racist and racialising literary and historical traditions of interpretation. The trio of monographs on Orientalism and sheikh or desert romances—Hsu-Ming Teo’s *Desert Passions: Orientalism and Romance Novels* (2012), Amira Jarmakani’s *An Imperialist Love Story. Desert Romances and the War on Terror* (2015) and Amy Burge’s *Representing Difference in the Medieval and Modern Orientalism Romance* (2016)—are early interventions in this direction, analysing the perpetuation of racist and racialising Orientalist tropes and stereotypes in literary representations and popular romance culture, and their deleterious effects on Arab and Muslim populations especially in the post-9/11 world. Jarmakani’s work is especially incisive in considering the ambivalent effects of representing non-white subjects in romantic fiction. She argues that positive depictions of the sheik in contemporary desert romances work to correct stereotypes of Arab/Muslim masculinity consolidated after 9/11, but they do so at the expense of reinforcing narratives of US exceptionalism and its universalising principles of liberal multiculturalism (20–1). Similarly underscoring the ambivalent outcomes of anti-racist agendas and postracial representations, Mallory Jagodzinski’s (2015) work on the historical romances of Theresa Romain, Meredith Duran and Courtney Milan concludes that by displacing the discussion of interracial relations between white women and Indian men to the context of British colonisation, the authors are actually engaging with twenty-first-century postracial narratives in the United States (5), but they do so with differing results, “both confirming and rejecting aspects of contemporary postracial thought through their interracial couples” (11).

Our collection takes up Erin Young’s (2020) challenge to “denaturalize the constructed cultural narrative of whiteness” (512), not only by incorporating discussions of romantic historical narratives by ethnically diverse authors but also by addressing some of the critical omissions that have characterised previous studies. Young challenges the normative whiteness of romance in two essays. In her work on historical Native American

romances, she argues that not only are the voices of Native American women authors insufficiently represented but that these romances—overwhelmingly produced by white authors bar a few exceptions (like Evangeline Parsons Yazzie, discussed in Silvia Martínez-Falquina’s chapter)—continue to feature stereotyped Native American characters. This reinscription of racialising stereotypes is not unique to Native American romances; Young’s second example of how to decentre romantic narratives by calling attention to the racial politics implicit in the texts relates to contemporary romances with Asian protagonists. She argues that although Elizabeth Lowell’s *Jade Island* (1999) and Katherine Stone’s *Pearl Moon* (1995) feature Asian-American female leads, the narrative arcs in these novels build to “racial and national victories for the white, Western heroes” rather than their Asian-American heroines (2020, 522). Teo (2020) similarly argues that the historical romances of Jade Lee (herself a part-Chinese author), featuring Westerners in late nineteenth-century China who fall in love with Chinese protagonists, reinscribes racist and Orientalist perceptions of Chinese culture: “The [Chinese] family is the malevolent site of oppression in almost every novel, Chinese filiality must be destroyed in order for Western individualism to triumph, and the only thing worth preserving about Chinese culture is its mystical Taoist sexual practices” (12). However, Teo proceeds to show how, in the hands of Chinese-American historical novelist Jeannie Lin, the complexities of culture, family and gender relations in Tang Dynasty China are successfully negotiated to produce a HEA ending that questions and decentres the individualistic ethos of western romance narratives and instead invokes familial love as a solution to romantic love (12).

Among the most innovative scholarship on the historical romance in the twenty-first century presenting a decolonial reading of the romantic narrative against different historical traditions and contexts is Jayashree Kamblé’s “When Wuxia Met Romance: The Pleasures and Politics of Transculturalism in Sherry Thomas’ *My Beautiful Enemy*” (2020). Kamblé’s essay explores Chinese-American novelist Sherry Thomas’ historical romance featuring a biracial heroine caught between two cultures engaging with history on many levels. Firstly, she provides a deft contextualisation of the novel’s setting: the imperial metropolis of late-Victorian Britain in 1891, and the north-west frontier of the Qing dynasty during that time. As is usual with studies of women’s historical writing, the gender and sexual politics of the historical period—both British and traditional Chinese—are presented and read against contemporary gender and sexual politics. Kamblé then affords the same scrutiny and analysis to racial, biracial and interracial politics and relationships in 1890s Britain and China, using *My Beautiful Enemy* to explore the position and liminal identity of subjects like the heroine who slip between racial, national and cultural boundaries especially through the process of migration from the outposts of empire to the centre of the imperial

metropolis. This historical journey is then mapped against Thomas' own experience of migration from China to the US as a teenager and that of other women who migrate from the impoverished Global South to the economically and culturally dominant Global North of the present day. Finally, Kamblé invokes the historical Chinese literary tradition of the *wuxia*—the martial arts narrative featuring a type of “knight errant” warrior bound by specific codes of loyalty, national allegiance and complex obligations—to analyse *My Beautiful Enemy*, skilfully demonstrating how the intersection of three traditions of writing—romance, *wuxia* and historical fiction—fruitfully produce an innovative, transcultural form of historical romance. Kamblé's essay is significant because it takes seriously the idea that historical romance has something to tell us about the past and its resonance in the present and the narrativisation of history. It emphasises that genres are historically-situated forms that are ever-changing and evolving in response to the issues, ideas and inspirations of the writer's own historical context. It suggests new, decolonial ways of reading the historical romance as neo-historical fiction.

The undoubted achievements of pioneering scholars of women's historical writing (Hughes 1993; Wallace 2005) coupled with post-millennial explorations of popular romance and neo-historical fiction have prized open a space for our discussion of women's romantic historical fiction and provided the tools to analyse these writings for what they have to say about history and the relationship of the present to the past. On the whole, women's romantic fiction has not been studied for what it might have to say about how women writers regard history or interpret and narrativise the past. This is despite the fact that, especially at the turn of the twenty-first century, women writers began to break away from the conventional characters, traditional tropes and chronotopes of historical romance to explore different historical eras and racially, culturally and sexually diverse protagonists. This volume is the first of its kind to consider how a genre—the genre of romantic fiction—might engage with historical writing and how it may bring about various forms of revision and reparation.

The romantic nature of the novels we explore in this volume also demands that we consider who is entitled to romantic fulfilment, and social and emotional justice, particularly in contexts marked by social turmoil, political conflict or asymmetrical relations of power. The stories we discuss in the following chapters are narrated against backgrounds marked by colonial domination and exploitation, war, violence or hegemonic impositions of power affecting not only women but also indigenous communities and racialised minorities who have been historically silenced or misrepresented in the official records. They “participate in historiographical arguments by offering neglected perspectives or focusing on places whose history has been ignored” (Keen 2006, 76). When not directly concerned with European imperial expansion, these novels engage with the manifold legacies of

modern Western empires, in the form of military conflicts, diaspora, neocolonialism or multiculturalism; that is, they are set in contexts where struggles over historical representation and restorative justice continue.

Chapter Overview

The romantic historical novels discussed in this volume embark on a mission to reconcile the past with the present and to ameliorate the trauma of the past especially for women, because that is what romance as a genre does. However, the work of repairing the past takes many different and sometimes even problematic forms. The first two chapters engage with the experiences of women in various colonial locations, where they face oppression and confront historical injustices but also gain access to a life of adventure, freedom and self-realisation. This section opens with Hsu-Ming Teo's chapter on the twenty-first century Australian convict romance and her analysis of Lena Dowling's prostitute heroines in her *Convict Wives* trilogy: *The Convict's Bounty Bride* (2013), *His Convict Bride* (2013), and *Convict Heart* (2017). In line with Australian feminist historians who are revising narratives of female convicts as passive victims, Dowling's novels clearly draw attention to their sexual coercion and exploitation, and Teo reads these novels against the concerns of the #MeToo movement. However, Dowling also uses the sex-positive conventions of the contemporary romance novel to destigmatise women's sexual behaviour and to legitimate women's sexual desire in her novels. In this way, the convict romance, Teo argues, ensures sexual and economic justice and reparation for convict prostitutes who receive narrative recompense for their sexual labour and its emotional and psychological costs, as well as sexual pleasure and a secure future in the form of a family so that they can become the founders of the emergent Australian nation.

Ramón Soto-Crespo's "Repurposing a Trashed World: Twenty-First Century Caribbean Authors of Romantic Historical Fiction and the Legacy of British Imperialism" focusses on twenty-first century popular romances set in the Caribbean: British Guyanese Christopher Nicole's *Manu* (2011) and *Queen of Glory* (2012), Irish Olive Collins' *The Tide Between Us* (2018), and Trinidadian Monique Roffey's *The White Woman on the Green Bicycle* (2009). These novels, Soto-Crespo suggests, explore the challenges faced by post-plantation societies that are still coming to terms with the legacy of colonialism and slavery. Soto-Crespo reads these novels against the tradition of 1970s and 1980s Caribbean popular romance to argue that these lesser and often disregarded body of post-plantation "trash" fiction can offer a more inclusive understanding of the past, contributing—just like their more literary counterparts—to the collective revision of historical interpretation, despite the fact that in all these novels love is thwarted by the damaging legacies of imperialism.

The second tranche of chapters is focused on romantic fiction set in nineteenth century Britain—traditionally among the most popular settings for historical romance (Hallock 2018)—but they engage with lesser-known histories, peoples and issues than the usual Regency or Victorian romance. Jayashree Kamblé’s “Love in Victorian London: Immigrant Histories and Intersecting Diversities in K. J. Charles’ *Sins of the Cities*” documents the presence of ethnic minorities in Victorian London through a discussion of K.J. Charles’ queer nineteenth-century romance *An Unseen Attraction* (2017). Charles’ work moves away from conventional romantic chronotopes of London as an exclusively white city common to historical romance and restores its “true colours” as an ethnically diverse colonial metropole. Far from resorting to anachronistic depictions of the city, as Kamblé’s deft historical contextualisation demonstrates, Charles’ novels realistically account for the complex social fabric of this colonial metropole, centring the lives and loves of BIPOC characters as active participants in shaping the history of the city.

Carmen Pérez Ríu’s exploration of Lorraine Heath’s popular romance series *The Scandalous Gentlemen of St. James* (2013–2017), set in Victorian London, explores the continuities between literary and critically acclaimed neo-Victorian novels, such as those written by Sarah Waters and Antonia Byatt, and popular romances set in the same historical period but often excluded from the neo-Victorian canon because they are perceived as weak in terms of their period contextualisation. The chapter underscores the value of these popular works not only as escapist pleasure but as historically and literary sophisticated forms of critical intervention upon the past. Pérez Ríu’s defines Heath’s novels as neo-Victorian popular romances, arguing that they share numerous features with their more literary counterparts, particularly in what concerns the use of anachronism. Anachronisms of language, character psychology and behaviour, Pérez Ríu argues, are necessary to project discussions of contemporary subjects onto this particular historical setting while maintaining the fantasy of the period.

Mariana Ripoll-Fonollar’s “Suffragette Historical Romances: Re-Purposing Women’s Suffrage in a Postfeminist Context” deals with a group of post-millennial historical romances featuring suffragette protagonists, which she situates in the context of the commemoration of women’s suffrage and the postfeminist marketing of the suffragette figure in popular narrative and visual media. Ripoll-Fonollar discusses the incompatibilities between these novels’ project of recuperating the history of female suffrage and the requirements of the compulsory happy ending, which forces the heroines to abandon suffrage, presented in these novels as an insurmountable barrier, in favour of love and marriage. Ironically then, the suffragette protagonists, who appear to embody independence, rebellion and subversion, come to embrace a more conventional position, while the history of suffrage is presented as an attenuated and depoliticised background, modified according to a postfeminist sensibility.

The final three chapters engage with the narrativisation of military conflict and genocidal events in different times and settings. In “The US Civil War and its Aftermath in Historical Quaker Romances: Hailing White Heroines as Builders and Healers of the Nation”, Carolina Fernández Rodríguez discusses a selection of historical Quaker romances by American authors like Mary Ellis, Lyn Cote and Anna Schmidt, set against different military conflicts, in particular the American Civil War. Fernández-Rodríguez argues that the novels bear witness to America’s conflictual relationship with its own history of war, race and gender abuse, and the country’s contradictory impulses to reject and promote social change. Thus, although the Quaker protagonists typically endorse progressive attitudes, defending pacifism and social justice, they simultaneously display more problematic and ambivalent attitudes when it comes to racial issues. In presenting these heroines as rescuers and saviours of “Indians” or Blacks, the novels marginalise these characters and deny their own active struggles against oppression; in neatly closing the wounds of the Civil War via romantic formulae uniting the female Quaker protagonists to military heroes, the novels prematurely block critical reflection on the effects of the war.

Silvia Martínez-Falquina’s chapter on *Her Land, Her Love* (2014), a historical romance by Navajo author Evangeline Parsons Yazzie, starts by framing this novel in relation to both contemporary popular romances and classical American genres like the captivity narrative, both of which stereotype Native American characters. It argues that Yazzie puts history to political use by narrating the protagonists’ love story against the background of the Navajo Long Walk and that romance works as a reparative mechanism, a form of restoring the memory and dignity of her people and a tool to vindicate their right to grieve their loss and image forms of reparation and emotional healing. The romantic elements are thus repurposed to emphasise a complex web of affective connections which extend beyond the lovers into the community and the land, illuminating the importance of relationality in Native American culture.

The book concludes with Hsu-Ming Teo’s “When a Jew Loves a Nazi: Problems with Repurposing the Holocaust for Reparative Romance”, which discusses the recent trend of transnational Holocaust romantic fiction featuring Jewish heroines who fall in love with Nazi officers. The chapter offers a detailed discussion of the representation of the Holocaust in popular culture and its current “Americanisation”, that is, its transformation into an optimistic narrative that favours typically American values, to then explore the limitations and dangers of repurposing the Holocaust according to romance conventions. Teo chooses two novels as case studies, Pam Jenoff’s *The Kommandant’s Girl* (2007) and Kate Breslin’s *For Such A Time* (2014), concluding that in wishing to ameliorate the impact and ongoing trauma of the Holocaust through love, these romance novels ultimately minimise the tragic dimensions of the Shoah and distort its historical implications.

Any edited collection inevitably faces constraints in terms of its scope and contents. Admittedly, a much larger project might have encompassed a more expansive range of geographies and histories. But then again, perhaps not. As with many edited collections, the choice of topics was constrained by the limited number of scholars working at the interface of romantic fiction and history when we initially began this project in 2018. There is certainly scope—and even necessity—for the sustained consideration of other types of history, and for authors from more diverse backgrounds. Late in the preparation of this collection, we became aware that the *Journal of Popular Romance Studies* was producing an innovative and significant special issue on Black Romance (volume 11, 2022) that included discussion of some Black historical romance novels, and some research is currently underway on Muslim romantic fiction that might also encompass the historical, via the University of Birmingham’s Muslim Women’s Popular Fiction network. It is our hope that this volume is merely the first of many future works to consider what romantic historical fiction might offer readers in terms of how the past is narrativised and deployed for reparative purposes but also in troubling ways that reinvoke the patriarchal and colonial past despite the author’s best intentions.

Notes

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- 2 For a discussion of postracial anachronism in the *Bridgerton* world, see Hsu-Ming Teo, “Exploring Anachronism, Ornamentalism, and Citizenization in the Postracial Regency World of *Bridgerton*”, *Clio: A Journal for History, Literature, and the Philosophy of History*, volume 51, forthcoming 2024.

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